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This Ship of State Leaks From

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By Daniel Schorr

PRESIDENT REAGAN presumably had his favorite target, the news media, in mind when he told CIA employees during a ground-breaking ceremony that "an intelligence agency cannot operate effectively unless its necessary secrets are maintained," and denounced unauthorized disclosure as "improper, unethical and just plain wrong."

The agency was, at that moment, reeling from the exposure of two major covert operations — not by the "liberal media," but by conservative stalwarts in Congress. Secrets are also spilled for political or ideological reasons by members of the administration — sometimes even by the president himself.

Sen. Jesse Helms, a supporter of Roberto d'Aubuisson, the right-wing candidate in El Salvador's election, "blew" an operation in which the agency funneled some \$1.2 million into comprehensive across-the-board services, much of it to help President Jose Napoleon Durate. Helms, like every senator, has access to classified information furnished to the Senate Intelligence Committee. He denied using this information. Nevertheless, Committee Chairman Barry Goldwater and Vice Chairman Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote an unusual "eyes only" letter to the Senate leadership, cautioning that unauthorized disclosure of such secrets violated Senate rules and

was punishable by reprimand, censure or even expulsion.

Ironically, Sen. Goldwater himself had been a recent offender against secrecy rules, having not only revealed the CIA's role in organizing the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, but also the presidential authorization for that program. In the clandestine world, there is no greater sin than stripping a president of "plausible deniability" for a cloak and dagger operation.

Goldwater, believing that he had been inadequately informed, exploded on the Senate floor about the mining of the harbors. His remarks were discreetly expunged from the

Congressional Record by his staff. Refusing to be silenced, the senator wrote a "I am pissed off" letter to CIA Director William Casey, which was released to the press.

He was outraged, he said, "about the discovery of the president having approved mining some of the harbors of Central America." He was especially upset, he wrote, to be in the position of having denied presidential involvement, only to find out the next day "that the CIA had, with the written approval of the president, engaged in such mining, and the approval came in February."

Nicaragua, recognizing a smoking gun when it saw one, introduced the Goldwater

letter as evidence in its case against the United States at the International Court of Justice in the Hague. The Sandinistas did not need to add much to the senator's statement to Casey, which declared: "This is an act violating international law. It is an act of war. For the life of me I don't see how we are going to explain it."

When it was suggested that Goldwater had failed to read or understand his briefing paper, the prickly senator "declassified" and sent to William Safire of The New York Times the exact language of the secret CIA memorandum: "Magnetic mines have been placed in the Pacific harbor of Corinto and the Atlantic harbors of El Bluff, as well as the oil terminal of Puerto Sandino."

Leaks, of course, are endemic to both branches of government and to both parties. Liberal Democrats have been attacked for years for playing fast and loose with the nation's secrets.

But some of the most egregious leaks are committed by conservatives who make a religion of national security. Sometimes it is because they do not appreciate the sensitive nature of the information they are dealing with. More often it is because they are willing to subordinate protection of secrecy to their political and ideological objectives.

For years, reporters covering national security affairs have been aware of the willingness of some Pentagon and intelligence officials to leak sensitive information to support their case about Soviet arms control cheating, or to undercut arms control proposals they opposed.

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eavesdropping on Kremlin limousines that the CIA had been trying to protect.

Sen. Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming, a stalwart Republican conservative, provided another case in point. In September 1980, he called my attention to a report in New York magazine saying that Ronald Reagan's pro-Taiwan campaign statements might jeopardize a secret agreement to set up facilities in China to monitor Soviet missile tests, replacing an installation in Iran lost after the Islamic revolution.

Wallop, who had been briefed on the project as a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, told me the Carter administration was exploiting a sensitive secret for political purposes. He seemed unaware, in his outrage, that he was tipping me off to the story and authenticating it. (President Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in what he later conceded to be a deliberate lie to protect a delicate secret, denied to me that there was a plan for any such installation in China.)

Less casual were the uses that Republican right-wingers, with links to the military and intelligence apparatus, made of sensitive secrets during the 1980 campaign.

On the eve of the Republican national convention in July 1980, as Sen. Helms spearheaded a drive to cancel a planned address by ex-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, an astounding story was leaked to Newsweek. It revealed that a CIA spy in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, code-named "Trigon," had furnished the agency with a microfilm copy of a cable from Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, recounting a breakfast conversation with Kissinger at the embassy on April 11, 1977.

Kissinger was depicted as cozying up to the Soviet ambassador, encouraging the Kremlin to resist President Carter's arms control and

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